

Character Building with Learning for Life

A research study conducted by Syndics Research Corporation and Dr. Kevin Ryan, Boston University, for Learning for Life

Overview

Learning for Life commissioned Syndics Research Corporation and Dr. Kevin Ryan, Boston University, to conduct a research study to test the effectiveness of its program. In particular, the goal of the study was to measure changes in knowledge and behavior of students who were taught eight lessons from the program and students who were not taught the lessons. Results from these two groups of students were then compared.

Approximately 2,500 students in 59 schools nationwide — in urban, suburban, and rural communities — were paired into Learning for Life classes, which received the eight lessons, and non-Learning for Life classes, which did not. None of the schools selected for the study had previously participated in the Learning for Life program.



Students in the second-, fourth-, and sixth-grade Learning for Life classes were taught eight lessons by their regular teachers after the teachers had received a two-hour orientation. Students in the non-Learning for Life classes received no special character-education instruction.

Locations of Participating Schools

Fifty-nine schools across the country participated in the assessment project, including schools in the following communities:



- Tacoma WA
- Las Vegas NV
- Pasadena CA
- Long Beach CA
- Denver CO
- Fort Worth TX
- Houston TX
- Minneapolis MN
- Kansas City MO
- Little Rock AR
- New Orleans LA
- Montgomery AL
- Columbus OH
- Munster IN
- Detroit MI
- Rochester NY
- Manchester NH
- Boston MA
- Norwalk CT
- Bethesda MD

Measures

All students in both the Learning for Life and non-Learning for Life classes were given a pre-test questionnaire that contained questions related to the concepts that were to be taught in the eight lessons. Similarly, all students were measured with a post-test questionnaire. The pre-test and post-test were identical to allow for comparative changes in attitude. Survey instruments were grade appropriate in format.

On the day after specific lessons were taught to the Learning for Life classes, students in both the Learning for Life and non-Learning for Life classes completed questionnaires related to the concepts being taught in the specific lesson. The percentage of appropriate responses in the two groups was then compared.

Teachers of both the Learning for Life and non-Learning for Life classes were asked to make a pre-test evaluation of each of their students on a variety of factors related to concepts being taught in the eight lesson plans: works well with others, is honest, has high self-worth, and other important values. Teachers were also asked to rate each student in their classes in a post-test evaluation after the eight lessons had been taught in the Learning for Life classes. Results were then compared.

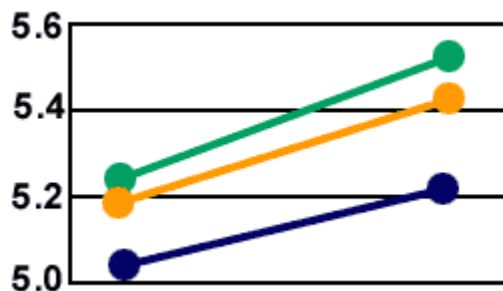
Findings

Students in the Learning for Life classes scored higher on questionnaires related to the concepts taught than students in the non-Learning for Life classes who received no instruction. This same result occurred for each of the eight lessons and at each grade level.

The most dramatic difference between the students taught the Learning for Life lessons and the students not taught the Learning for Life lessons was apparent in a comparison of the pre-test and post-test teacher evaluations of student behavior on a variety of factors related to the lessons. There was no significant change in the observed behavior of students in the non-Learning for Life classes. In contrast, the teachers in the Learning for Life classes reported significant improvements in the observed behavior of their students on the same factors.

Test Classes (Learning for Life) Classroom Behavior

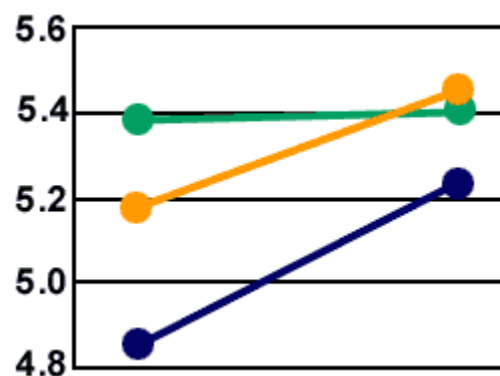
Urban Suburban Rural



Means based on a seven-point scale: 7 = Excellent; 1 = Poor.

Test Classes (Learning for Life) Classroom Behavior

2nd Grade 4th Grade 6th Grade



Means based on a seven-point scale: 7 = Excellent; 1 = Poor.

Learning for Life Works in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Areas

Teachers of students in the Learning for Life classes saw a significant improvement in the behavior of students after the students had participated in the eight Learning for Life lessons. This improvement was seen in all three subgroups of the Learning for Life classes: urban, suburban, and rural.

The professional judgment of the Learning for Life teachers showed that the observable behavior of Learning for Life students dramatically improved compared with that of non-Learning for Life students.

Learning for Life Helps Improve Classroom Behavior

Teachers of second- and sixth-grade students reported a statistically significant improvement in the classroom behavior of their students after the students had participated in the Learning for Life lessons.

The overall rating of the fourth-grade students was higher but not statistically significant. The behavior of students in the non-Learning for Life classes did not change significantly.

Summary

Students in the Learning for Life classes made some important gains. Some key findings of this study are:

Post-Test Scores Were Higher

Students in the Learning for Life classes showed a 20 percent gain in appropriate responses from the pre-test to the post-test. This compared with the much lower gain of only 6 percent in students in the non-Learning for Life classes.

Lesson Scores Were Higher

Students in the Learning for Life classes scored higher on questionnaires related to issues taught in the lessons than did students in the non-Learning for Life classes. This was true for all eight lessons and at each grade level.

Second-Graders Gained the Most

On almost all scores, the second-grade students in the Learning for Life classes showed the greatest gain in the number of appropriate responses. This suggests the importance of reaching students at an early age with this kind of instruction.

Classroom Behavior Improved

Teachers reported that students in the Learning for Life classes showed significant improvement in behavior. No such improvement was seen in the students in non-Learning for Life classes.

These findings suggest that exposure to only eight lessons from the Learning for Life program positively affected the behavior and attitudes of second-, fourth-, and sixth-grade students.

Learning for Life Enables Students to ...

- Build self-worth and self-confidence
- Build self-reliance and self-discipline
- Develop a sense of personal and social responsibility
- Show how they can do their best
- Learn the value of helping others
- Develop the capacity to get along with others
- Learn to have respect for themselves and others
- Develop a sense of personal achievement by learning new skills
- Gain an enhanced self-image through group activities that develop personal responsibility
- Develop a sense of fair play and team spirit
- Develop pride in both physical and mental growth
- Become fully participating citizens in their communities